

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 3, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Docket No. APHIS-2005-0096

Dear Secretary Schafer:

We are writing to you to express our concern over the proposal by USDA to regionalize trade with Argentina for the importation of ruminants and ruminant products. Last January, the USDA proposed to allow for the importation of Argentine meat products into the United States despite Argentina's checkered past with Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). Under the USDA proposal, products could flow from designated regions in Argentina that are deemed to be FMD free.

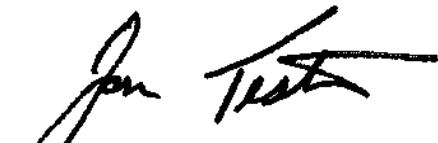
We have serious concerns about the implementation of such a plan. Questions remain about the effectiveness of animal disease controls and tracking in Argentina. Weaknesses in this system could have serious effects on the American livestock industry. FMD is among the most contagious of livestock diseases and is spread by air. As you know, FMD continues to be found in cattle in Argentina and the risk of transmission to United States herds poses an unacceptable risk to United States producers. The USDA will be unable to ensure that the disease will not enter FMD-free regions of Argentina and beyond.

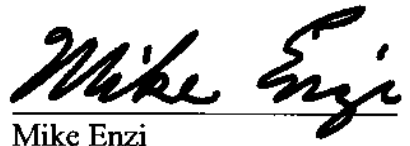
The USDA would be taking unnecessary risks if it implements this proposed rule, and put the United States livestock industry and our rural economies in jeopardy. FMD is widely considered the most economically devastating of livestock diseases, and a recent study by Kansas State University found that an outbreak in the state of Kansas alone would cost more than \$900 million.

Before issuing judgment on the proposal, we respectfully request that USDA carefully analyze the full economic cost of this proposal including the risk of a FMD outbreak in America, and the impact on prices paid to domestic producers from increased Argentinean imports. We also request that you note our strong objections to this proposal to regionalize imports.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,




Jon Tester


Mike Enzi


John Barrasso


Claire McCaskill


Byron Dorgan


Tim Johnson


Kent Conrad


Pete Domenici